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6

GEEVARGHESE PANICKER

**The Church
in the
Syriac Tradition**



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GEEVARGHESE PANICKER

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The Church in the Syriac Tradition

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SECTION I

Introduction

Description of the terms (i) *Church* (ii) *Syriac Tradition* and (iii) *Syriac Churches*

(i) Church

Jesus founded his church (Mat 16:18). This is the common conviction of the Christian churches. Wherever ecclesial Christianity (i.e. Christianity in the form of a community called Church) is found, it is convinced that it has its origin in Christ. It is convinced that it does not establish a relation to Jesus autonomously and by itself. This relation has its origin in and is established by the crucified and risen Jesus himself; this is an act of Jesus and not primarily an act of the church itself. We would say:

First, the church was founded in the first place by the fact Jesus is the person whom the believers professed to be the absolute saviour (*Jesus* means saviour) and to be God's historically irreversible and historically tangible offer of himself, and by the fact that he would not be who he is if the offer of himself which God the Father made in him did not continue to remain present in the world in the historically tangible profession of faith in Jesus. Secondly this faith may not be regarded as something which happens in the private interiority of an individual. In this case it could never be the continuation of God's offer of himself in Jesus. Rather it must be public, it must be a profession, it must be the faith of a community. Hence the church has its origins in Jesus Christ because faith as a public and communal profession has its origin in him. Thirdly, the faith which in this sense forms community must have

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a *history*, and hence so must the church itself, because there is a *history* of salvation. For faith in Jesus in a later generation is always co-conditioned by the tradition of the previous generation, and does not always arise absolutely new by a kind of primordial generation. But this history of faith in the church, a history which includes both change and ongoing identity because both of these belong to genuine history, this historicity includes the following: every later epoch in such a history continues to have its origin in the previous epoch, even when it diverges from its previous epoch.

The authority of the church is one. The church has been commissioned to defend the revelations of God's salvation to proclaim it, and to submit to its authority. See, Mat. 28 : 16-20; Mat 16 : 18; John 21 : 15-18, John 20: 21-23; Gal 1:6-9. The Church is Christ's body. See, Eph 1 : 22-23, 1 Cor 12 : 12-31. The Church is not a passive society in the world, it receives its power and direction from Jesus Christ, who has given it His authority to fulfil his mission. The authority of the Church must be held in high regard. The Church in the course of history carries on the same mission of the Church — the message of salvation - at all times.

ii) Syriac Tradition

We have already noted that faith in Jesus in a later generation is always co-conditioned by the *tradition* of the previous generation. In the history of Christianity, often Christian tradition has been divided into the Latin West and the Greek East. This dichotomy is both unfortunate and inadequate; it completely overlooks the existence of the Oriental Christian churches which constitute an important third stream of Christian tradition, quite distinct from the other two familiar streams. Among the oriental Christian churches those within the Syriac liturgical tradition may be said to hold pride of place, since they are representatives of, and to some degree direct heirs to, the Semitic world out of which Christianity sprang. This a matter of pride

for them; still today they employ as their liturgical language, Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, the very language of Jesus. The form of the Lord's prayer used in the Syriac Churches today is indeed not all that much different from the words that Jesus himself must have uttered in first century Galilean Aramaic: Syriac (the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa, the traditional birth place of Syriac Christianity) and Galilean Aramaic would certainly have been mutually comprehensible.

Although Syriac Christianity, like Latin Christianity, soon came under the very strong influence of Greek speaking Christianity, its earliest literature is usually expressed in a manner much more characteristic of the Semitic - and biblical - world out of which it grew. In the writings of the greatest representative of the early form of Syriac Christianity, St. Ephrem of Nisibis (C. 306-373), poetry not prose holds primacy of place as the vehicle for theology and his profound theological vision, expressed in poetry by means of paradox and symbol, rather than by analysis and definition in prose, is one that retains its value, *mutatis mutandis*, even today. Further more, as the sole representative of a semitic Christianity which was for the most part still unhellenized—in other words uneuropianized and unwesternized—early Syriac Christianity takes on a new relevance in the modern world where the churches of Asia, Africa and South America are rightly seeking to shake off the European cultural baggage from the christianity which they have usually received through the mediary of European or North American missionaries; hence in the early Syriac tradition, we encounter a form of christianity whose theological expression is as yet uninfluenced by the Greek Philosophical tradition, but which employs through forms that are far more conducive to these churches' own cultural backgrounds.

From this point of view it is the earliest Syriac writers—and above all the theologian-poet Ephrem—who are of most importance, far from the fifth century onwards the Syriac tradition came to be increasingly influenced by Greek tho-

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ught-forms and modes of expression. This hellenophile process reached its climax in the seventh century; by that time it has often become very difficult to tell whether a particular syriac text was composed in that language or whether it is in fact a literal translation from Greek. Ironically it was at precisely this point in history that the Arab invasions effectively cut the syriac churches off from the Byzantine world to which they had for the most part belonged. In the ensuing centuries the theologians of the Syriac churches systematized the theology that they had inherited from the Greek world in the course of the sixth and early seventh centuries. More or less contemporary with St. Thomas Syrians, the great Syrian Orthodox Scholar Barhebreus compiled his own *Summa theologica*, equally based on the Aristotelean tradition.

Syriac Christianity thus comprises two quite distinct poles, which we can for convenience term the Semitic and Hellenic. Between these two poles there is, of course, a continuum, and even a writer like Ephrem, one of our main witnesses to the Semitic pole, is certainly not free from the influence of Greek thought, but this influence affects, as it were, only the surface, and never the deep structures, of his thought patterns and mode of expression.

iii) The Syriac Churches

One reason for the neglect of Oriental Christian tradition lies in the fact that many of these churches became separated from the 'main-stream' church of the Greco-Latin world during the fifth and sixth centuries as a result of the christological controversies of the time. The doctrinal formulation put forward by the Council of Chalcedon (451), in particular, proved a stumbling block; for the statement that the incarnate Christ was one 'hypostasis' in two 'natures' seemed to many not only a logical impossibility, but also dangerously heretical, in that it appeared to them to deny the full reality of the incarnation. In the heat of the ensuing controversies, the various parties were not willing to step back and consider whether or not their verbally conflicting

Definitions might just be due to the use of different conceptual models and a different understanding of the key terms in the debate. The lamentable result of all this was the emergence in the sixth and seventh centuries of separate Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian hierarchies in the Near East.

The non-Chalcedonian churches today usually known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches, all belong to the Alexandrian Christological tradition of Cyril of Alexandria. Among their number is the Syrian Orthodox Church, (including the two factions of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Syria and Malabar). At the other end of the theological spectrum comes another important representative of Syriac Christianity, the Church of the East. For this church, whose centre of gravity lay outside the Roman empire and in the Persian empire of the East, it was the Antiochene theological tradition, represented above all by Theodore of Mopsuestia which constituted the norm of orthodoxy. In the course of the fifth and sixth centuries the church of the East came to feel more and more alienated from the theological developments that were taking place within the Roman empire. For them the 'ecumenical councils' were just internal affairs of the Roman *Oikumene*: the Council of Ephesus (431) they viewed with open disapproval, whereas Chalcedon was regarded as only a partial (and hence unsatisfactory) remedy for the ills brought about in the years intervening between 431 and 451; the Fifth Council of Constantinople (553), was seen as wholly retrogressive.

Almost all extant syriac literature dating from the fifth century onwards belongs to one or other of these churches. (The Melkite and the Maronite are Chalcedonian Churches and have their roots in Syriac Christianity the first having been byzantinized and the later having been latinized, retain many characteristics of early Syriac Christianity).

The Syriac Christian tradition is thus the heritage of several different Oriental Churches, and it is today represented wherever these churches are to be found in the world;

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this means not only in the middle east, but also in India (Kerala), where the connections with Syriac Christianity go back to earliest times, and in the large diasporas that have grown up in the present century in Europe, the Americas, and Australia.

What we propose here is to attempt to study the ecclesiology in the Syriac tradition taking into consideration the Syrian Orthodox tradition and the tradition of the church of the East. We propose to study the concept of the church according to the Syrian Orthodox tradition and the tradition of the church of the East in the ensuing chapters after a few general remarks on the development of Ecclesial thought in the early church.

SECTION II

Development of Ecclesiological Thought

The systematic treatise on the church is called Ecclesiology. Such a kind of treatise on the church appeared late in the history of Christian thought. It began in the West towards the end of the middle ages and reached the culmination at the Second Vatican Council. In this development of ecclesiological thought scholars often distinguish three phases which are essentially related; (i) The Fathers and the Theologians upto the middle ages (ii) the formation of the treatise on the Church, (iii) Contemporary theological progress. Our study in this context can only deal with the first phase in the development of ecclesiological thought.

It is not possible here to discuss in detail the difficult problem of the foundation of the Church. Only a few essential indications are possible. The findings of the New Testament sources are best represented by the idea (also put forward by the second Vatican Council) of an extended establishment of the Church; one that took place in stages, and which extends to the entire activity of Jesus, earthly as well as exalted. In the apostolate of the earthly Jesus, among his disciples, at his meals, and especially the last meal before his death, and so forth, there are pre-paschal *vestigia ecclesiae*, which could be used as 'foundation stones' in the new post-Easter situation. The new community needed no express word of establishment. It was established with the Easter appearances and the mandate to preach and baptize grounded in those appearances (Mt 28: 19). That means that the Church is in fact the apostolic Church, which must contain commissioned

witnessed of the Gospel (cf. Rom 10. 14 ff). The word of reconciliation and the service of reconciliation were first established in the work of reconciliation (2 Cor 5: 19). Like the apostolic proclamation which grounded the Church, the eucharistic community is directly established with the Easter appearances. The Resurrected Jesus resumes the eucharistic community with his disciples that was interrupted by his death. He is now with and among his own in a new way—in the sign of the meal. Hence many of the Easter appearances take place in the context of meals (Lk 24: 30 ff; 36-43; Jn 21: 9-14). The Eucharist, in addition to the word, is the genuine place of encounter with the Risen Lord. In that sense, we may say not only that Jesus was 'raised into the kerygma', but that he 'rose again in the liturgy'.

Once the disciples had broken their community with Jesus by denial and flight, the new assurance of the eucharistic community also became a sign of forgiveness. The Resurrection also establishes the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of the eschatological Shalom. John most clearly brought this out by explaining the new band of disciples as the place where forgiveness of sins is possible: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (20 : 23). Accordingly, reacceptance into the company of the disciples is also a sign of reacceptance into communion with God. Essentially, that is what later became the 'sacramentality' of penance. The Eucharist and the sacrament of penance do not derive primarily from an isolated act of foundation by Jesus. They are established with the Resurrection and the appearances of the Resurrected one. They are a symbolic expression of the new redemptive presence of Jesus in and among his own.

The new gathering into a community provoked by Easter, and the profession of that community are therefore part of the eschatological event. The Church itself is an eschatological and ultimate nature of the new history opened up with the Resurrection. That means in fact that the

Church is indestructible or indefectible. Church will always be. But the Church is only the Church of Jesus Christ as long as it persists in faith in Jesus Christ the Crucified and Resurrected. It is characteristic of the eschatological nature of the Church that it can never fundamentally depart from the truth of Christ. The saving truth of God is permanently granted to the world by Jesus Christ in and through the Church. Christ is lastingly present in history in the Church's proclamation of faith and doctrine, in its liturgy and in its sacraments and in its whole life.

1. The Fathers and the theologians upto the middle ages

The Fathers and the theologians upto the middle ages never composed a treatise on the church. The reality of the church is presupposed in the proclamation of the gospel and cannot be separated from the whole dogmatic structure of which it forms the existential foundation. The church was a reality in the life of the faithful, and not merely an optional institution to which occasionally people paid homage to, or about which people in their spare moments discussed. Because of this, the experience of the church regenerated by the Spirit (given as a gift of the Father by the risen Son) conditions the whole of Christian reflection. The church is built upon the "foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2: 20) and gathers together in Church all his disciples.

It must be understood in the light of the whole revelation, and especially of the life and work of Christ which are once more called to mind by the Holy Spirit who makes of the community of believers, the dwelling place of a completely new existence and the sign of accomplishment of God's plan for the world.

Even from the beginning of Christianity itself the church was presented to the world as the proclamation and the presence of the salvation brought by Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 3: 4, the church is seen as the "mystery of Christ", because in it is realised the eternal plan of the Father, inaugurating on the cross the union of humanity,

jews and gentiles in the church, and leading it to the consummation where "God will be everything to everyone" (1 Cor. 15 : 28). The word "mystery" comes from Jewish apocalyptic (Dan. 2 : 18 ff), and now means the act whereby God manifests his love in the wisdom incarnate of Jesus Christ, to bring mankind to glory. It is the word of God as the fullness of revelation and its accomplishment of the "secret" hidden for ages in God (Col. 1 : 16; Eph 3 : 3-9; 1 Cor. 2 : 6-10). Hence the mystery implies that the saving incarnation takes effect in the Church through the preaching of the word and through the sacraments, thus leading it to the glory of heaven. The Redemption of Christ calls the church into being (Eph. 2 : 13-16; 5 : 25 ff, Col. 1 : 20-22) and there achieves its fulfilment, as all mankind is assembled in the church. God the Father "has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him" thus exalted head of the church, which is his body, the fullness (pleroma) of him who fills the universe in all its parts" (Eph. 1 : 22-23).

2. The period before the 5th century is Common to the two Syriac traditions

For *the early Fathers* the whole of scripture spoke of Christ and his church: they saw the Church through the imagery of the Bible (people, body, temple, spouse, flock, vineyard, kingdom, field and net) and the typological interpretation of the O. T. We see that the Christianity of the Fathers was essentially ecclesial, of the church. Men works out his salvation in the Church and with the help of her mysteries; personal faith itself received through adhesion to the church's tradition, is saving only in the setting of effective participation in her unity and life. Keeping these general remarks which, are common to all the traditions of the early church, we shall now proceed to deal with the concept of the church in the tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church and in the tradition of the church of the East.

It also must be noted that the period before the fifth century divisions can be considered as common to both

these traditions. The most important personalities of this period are Aphrahat and Ephrem. They hardly provide enough material for an account of their ecclesiology in terms of church order and discipline. Their thought on the church is expressed almost entirely through typology and imagery, either traditional (i. e. in terms of New Testament themes) or freely invented. What formal or systematic concerns they have are quite different from those of the western theological treatises. Ecclesiology in particular as a formal subject of study is a late development even in the west. The western mind looks for a logical order. But the ideas and trains of thought of semitic writers are not to be rendered in categories that go back to Greek philosophical method.

SECTION III

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT WRITERS

Aphrahat and Aprem are two early Syrian writers who represent the undivided (between East and West) patrimony the Syriac liturgy.

(i) Aphrahat (260—345)

Aphrahat and Ephrem are typically semitic in the way they order their matter. An argument proceeds not by exhausting topics successively but with frequent *inclusio*, circling round on itself like a conversation round a fire, gradually advancing and going deeper. Aphrahat, for example, starts with the house of faith (Aphrahat's First *Demonstration*) as the foundation of all he has to say; but it is only by comparison that we can see that our subject, the church, is implicit in his figure of the house on the rock.

Aphrahat's first *Demonstration* is about faith, and immediately he proposes his theme under the figure of a 'house built on the crag of the firm rock' which is Christ: (*Dem.* 1. 5. 16—8. 18—so a d-kepha serrerta) To what extent the church is implicit in this 'house' is to be examined. Aphrahat promises to prove that the Prophets called Christ the *Kepha*; accordingly he proposes a classic little testimony-series from both testaments.

1. Ps. 118 : 22. 'The Kepha which the builders rejected has become the head of the building (the usual pshutta text).
2. Ps. 28 : 16: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a tested *Kepha*, in the corner of honour, the head of the wall of the foundation and none who has faith in it will fear;
3. Lk 20 : 18 "And whoever falls on the *Kepha* shall be broken, and all on them it falls, it shall shatter;

4. Dan. 2 : 34—44 : “For a *Kepha* was cut from a mountain without hands, and it smote the image, and the whole earth was filled by it.

Aphrahat relates this to Christ filling the whole world by his Gospel, applying Ps. 19 : 4, “Into all the world has gone forth the Word of the Gospel of Christ and Matt. 28, 19.

5. Zech. 4:7: “I saw a principal stone of fairness and mercy.”
 6. Zech. 5 : 9 : “On this *Kepha* I will open seven eyes”, which, says Aphrahat, are the seven fold spirit of God, referred to also by Zech. 4 : 10.

Aphrahat develops the *image of a building at length*, but always as the structure of faith, laid on the foundations of Christ the rock. In this he naturally makes use of 1 Cor. 3: 10–11, where St. Paul speaks of Christ as the foundation of our faith. In all this figure it is the act of building on Christ that is *primary*, rather than the fact that a house is built and the figure is not applied directly to the church as such. But more is probably implicit. When the whole building has gone up and is finished and perfected, it becomes a house and temple for the indwelling of Christ’ (*Dem.* 1, 8-25;9.2) Then after a bold adaptation of Jer. 7: 4–5, Aphrahat quotes the classical texts on the divine indwelling 2 Cor. 6: 16, 1 Cor. 3:16 and John 14:20. He then speaks how a man must behave towards his royal guest (*Dem.* 1, 9.11 ff) Thus the figures has changed from a building similar to a concrete symbol, but the indwelling is considered as it is in the individual, not in the Church, which in Paul’s thought is prior.

After the testimony-series Aphrahat elaborates his spiritual architecture. Christ is the foundation, but also the “head of the wall”, and the whole building is perfected with stones, but we are not told what these are. In *Dem.* II, ‘On charity’, the figure of the building comes again, founded on charity (*Dem.* II, 81:24); or again faith is the house on the rock and Charity is what holds the wall together (*Dem.* II 84–14 ff) Clear allusions to Matt 7: 24 ff recur in the

exhortation to the Bnay Q Yama (*Dem.* VI, 241-5, 249. 17-19). In the second instance here there is also a reference to the figure of building a tower in Luke 14: 28-9. The same occurs again in *Dem.* XIV (681, 24-6).

He is the tower on which many build. let us reckon its cost, that we may build and finish it.

Comparison with Ephrem shows that this is a concealed allusion not only to Luke 14: 28-9 but also to the Tower of Babel as a type (by contrast) of the Church (EC 14,2). For convenience we quote the relevant passage from Ephrem:

And when he had built this church, there was built the tower whose foundations are sufficient for all that is built on them. And whereas the one language was divided into many languages, so that men might not ascent to heaven, that is, that they might be prevented from putting their trust in the tower rather than in righteousness; (for the abyss did not bring forth the Flood against them that they might take refuge on the heights, but sin drowned them, while penance brought salvation, that is, righteousness brought deliverance); whereas the dispersal of those men brought an end to the earthly tower and the temporal establishment and the destructible place of refuge, the life giver gave them from himself a Tower which leads up to the heights and a Tree whose fruit is the medicine of life.

The use of *the Vine-symbolism* is also found in Aphrahat. This is part of common christian tradition, growing out of the New Testament as it grew out of the old. Aphrahat combines the images of the labourers in the vineyard and of vines incorporated in Christ (Karma can mean Vine, and Vineyard). At the end of *Dem.* II, 'on charity' (*Dem.* II, 96. 9-10) he says, "He has hired us like workmen to labour in his vineyard"—and then a phrase which is untranslatable (-d-huja karma da-srra), except as two alternatives, either 'which is the true vineyard' or more probably, with 'his' as antecedent (who is the true vine(yard)). But in *Dem.* VI

'On the Sons of the Covenant', Aphrahat passes from labourers to vines in a passage of strongly rhythmic exhortation (*Dem.* VI, 244, 13-20):

Let us be diligent workmen,
 that we may claim our reward with the earliest;
 Let us bear the burden of the day,
 that we may ask for a greater reward.
 Let us not be idle workmen,
 for see, our Lord has hired us for his vineyard.
 Let us be planted as vines in his vineyard,
 who (which ?) is the true Vine(yard).
 Let us be good vines,
 that we be not uprooted from that vineyard.

In *Dem.* XIV (680. 13-16), in a long apostrophe to the bishops and clergy, again in highly artistic parallelism, comes the phrase. "You are vines in vineyard, seed of good wheat bearing fruit a hundred fold", and soon after, (681, 22-4)

He is the true Vine (yard) and his Father is
 the vinedresser;
 and we are the Vines planted in his (its) midst

Clearly Aphrahat sees the Johannine text as expressing our incorporation in Christ, though the image is ambiguous in its expression of the nature of the union, compared with the effect of an unequivocal word for 'vine'.

Aphrahat uses a large number of titles of Christ which either refer to the Church as correlative (for example as Bride of Christ the Bridegroom) or are shared by members of the church, especially Apostles or Bishops. These which interest us for their ecclesiological reference are concentrated most strikingly in *Dem.* XIV, the letter of exhortation written by Aphrahat in the name of a Synod in 344. Here the clergy are addressed by a series of 33 symbolic titles, many of which are elsewhere used of Christ or are correlative to Christ; then in a strongly rhythmic continuation a series of 21 titles are applied to 'us', the church.

Dem. XIV, 677. 23-684-14

Our beloved, sons of peace, disciples of Christ;
 You are the *light* of the world,
 the salt of the earth and the eye of the body,
 You are the *friends of the Bridegroom*,
 the good seed, the *foundation laid on the rock*.
 You are the wise *architects*
 who dig foundations and lay bare what is rotten.
 You are industrious *farmers*,
 filling storehouses and garnering produce.
 You are wise *merchants*,
 receiving money and showing a profit.
 You are the hired *labourers*
 who receive wages and ask for more.
 You are the *holders of the keys*,
 faithful *ambassadors* and *blowers of the trumpets*.
 You are *stewards* and dispensers,
 new wineskins and robes of glory.
 You are *apostles*,
 betrothers of the Bride adorned, and *light* in darkness.
 You are sons of peace,
 brothers of Christ and the *Temple* of the Spirit.
 You are runners in the contest,
 toilers in the stadium and winners of crowns.
 You are *vines in the vineyard*,
 and seed of good wheat, bearing fruit a hundredfold.
 You are the lighters of *lamps*
 for those who enter by the narrow gate of the kingdom.
 You are those who stand on the right hand,
 who walk by the strait and narrow way.
 You are the saved by the Cross,
 the redeemed by the Body and Blood of Christ;
 You are Christ's *ambassadors*
 heralds who bring [souls] to birth by water.
 You are the sweet savour
 whose fragrance is shed abroad everywhere
 You are the new lump [of dough]
 in which there remains no old leaven.
 You are the guests of the *Bridegroom*,
 arrayed in robes fit for the feast.

You are bearers of the yoke,
 sitting in silence, prisoners of the assembly.
 You are the children of the Church
 educators of her sons and gatherers of the flock.
 You are the glorious *shepherds*
 who bring their flocks back into good pastures;
 and our Lord Jesus Christ is the *chief Shepherd*,
Light in darkness, *Lamp* on the lamp-stand,
 who brought light to the world and absolved sins.
 For he is the good *pearl*;
 and we are the *merchants* who have sold our possessions
 and bought it.

He is the treasure in the field:
 and we, when we found it, rejoiced in it and acquired it.

He is the fountain of life,
 and we who were thirsty have drunk of it.

He is the table full of richness and plenty;
 and we who were hungry have eaten and rejoiced.

He is the gate of the Kingdom
 that is opened before all who enter.

He is the joy-giving wine
 of which mourners drink and their pains are forgotten.

He is the garment and robe of glory
 which all the victorious put on.

He is the *Vine (yard)* of truth and his Father is the *Vinedresser*,
 and we are *vines* planted in his midst.

He is the *tower* on which many build;
 let us consider its price, that we may build and
 complete it.

He is the *Bridegroom*, the Apostles are the *betrothers*,
 and we are the *Bride*; let us prepare our dowry.

He is the ladder which leads up on high;
 let us toil and strive to ascend by it to the Father.

He is the strait and narrow *Way*;
 Let us journey in his footsteps, that we may arrive at
 the haven.

He is the *Pontiff*, the holy minister;
 let us strive to be sons of his *fold*.

He is the King, son of great lineage,

who went forth to receive the kingship;

let us honour his lowliness,

that he may make us sharers in his greatness.

He is the *Herald* and *Apostle* of the Most High;

let us listen to his words, that we may be sharers in
his counsel.

He is the grain of seed bringing much fruit,

which though small was sown and became a great tree.

The application of Kepha symbolism to Simon is also referred to by Aphrahat in his works. Aphrahat says: 'Also Simon who was called Kepha, because of his faith was called "Firm Rock" (Kepha sarirta) of *Dem.* I, 40, 27-41 . 1. In the *Demonstration* 'On Penitents', after David and Aaron, Simon Peter is proposed as a mode of repentance; after he had denied his Lord he repented and "Our Lord accepted him and made him a foundation, and called him *Kepha*, the building of the Church" (*Dem.* VII, 336, 17-22). There is a passing but significant reference in a passage on the Transfiguration. Christ took with him "Simon Kepha, the foundation of the church, and James and John, strong pillars of the Church" (*Dem.* XXIII, 36. 10-12). After all Aphrahat's insistence in *Dem.* I that Christ is the foundation on which is raised the house of faith, he now almost carelessly as if alluding to something taken for granted calls Simon Kepha both the foundation and even the building of the church. Aphrahat hints at the Holy Spirit living in the church in *Dem.* XII, 525. 1-4: "He called their tabernacle the 'temporal tabernacle' (Maskan Zabna) because it served only for a limited time; but ours he has called the Temple of the Holy Spirit, which is forever". While the primary antitype of the tabernacle, here is Christ's body, the context implies a communal and therefore ecclesiological sense. It may also be significant that the following paragraph, though it proposes a new theme, immediately refers to the eating of the passover in one house (*Ex.* 12 : 46), with the comment "The one house is the church of God", (of *Dem.* XII, 525,8.)

ii) Mar Aphrem

Ephrem in a complex meditation in the collection *De Ecclesia*, sees the replacement of the tables of the Law, which Moses broke in anger, as a type of 'replacement' at three levels— in the Redemption of fallen men, in the fulfilment of types, and in the church succeeding the Synagogue (H. Eccl. 44, 21—6, CSCO 19 8, Syr. 84, P.113)

Hear again another type
with another sense:
how in new tablets for old
the Law clothed itself,
to represent by the tablets
the two assemblies

The Assembly which preceded in time
came (only) for a time;
It went out and was rejected
and shall not return home;
But he that put on the church
wills not to strip it off.

And because there the Assembly
perished through the calf,
He destroyed and broke the tablets
to teach that it was rejected;
but this cause cried that it should remain
till the fullness of time,

(Namely) that he should not hurt
the righteous who were in it;
and again, so as not to conceal
the types he expressed in it,
not cut off the roots
that were linked to the New.

Here again another aspect
through another parable;
Just as the Law in Passion
stripped off the stones,
on account of their transgression,
and again was clothed in stones,

So our Lord put on the body
 and suffered for sins;
 She who had angered him by the calf
 angered him through the thief,
 but Our Lord put on anew,
 the body and rose again.

The image of putting on clothes is here applied first to the Law, clothed in the first tablets which Moses broke and there in the new tablets; then, since the replacement of the tablets is made a type of the church replacing the former assembly, the figure of clothing is applied to God's election of the church; and finally to the Incarnation and Resurrection, which also, perhaps, are seen as an antitype of the old and new tablets.

The image of the Church as Bride and Mother

In Ephrem's comment on the marriage at Cana, Christ is presented as the heavenly Bridegroom, ready for his marriage typified by the earthly bridegroom of Cana (cf *Evangelium Concordans*, ie. *Diatesseron* 5, 8). The marriage of Christ and his church is a frequent theme in Ephrem's hymns. The fullest treatment of the theme is in *H Resurre* 3, 1—7—

As well as the whole church, Ephrem contemplates the local church as Christ's bride and as enjoying his jealous love. In *Carmines Nisibena* 6 the church of Nesibis, cries to her jealous spouse:

Be jealous for me, for I am thine
 and to thee, Lord am I betrothed:
 The Apostle who betrothed me to thee
 told me that thou art the jealous one.
 A bulwark to chaste wives
 is the jealousy of their husbands ...

Ephrem makes Mary the type of the church. In the *Hymn on Crucifix* 4, 17, he says:

Mary who saw him
 is a type of the church, which first
 is to see the sign of his coming.

Again in the memre of the Holy week this is clearly seen (of course involving an undeniable 'fusion' of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene)

He drew Mary Magdalene
to come and see his Resurrection.
And why was it first to a woman
that he showed his resurrection, and not to men.
Here he showed us a mystery
concerning his church and his Mother,

At the beginning of his coming to earth
a virgin was first to receive him,
and at his raising up from the grave
to a woman he showed his resurrection.

In his beginning and in his fulfilment
the name of his mother cries out and is present.

Mary received him by conception
and saw an angel before her;
and Mary received him in life
and saw angels at his grave.

Again, Mary is like the church,
the Virgin, who was borne the first fruits by the
Gospel
In the place of the church, Mary saw him.

Blessed be he who gladdened the Church and Mary;
Let us call the church itself 'Mary'
for it befits her to have two names.

For to Simon, the Foundation,
Mary was first to run,
and like the Church, brought him the good news
and told him what she had seen
that our Lord had risen and was raised up.

Fittingly did she come to Simon
and bring him the good news that the son was risen,
For he was the Rock and Foundation
of the church of the Gentiles, the elect.

(cf Lamy I, 531—3)

And again little later:

But Mary type of the church
looked into the sepulchre

(Lamy I, 535)

Whatever may have been the cause of the fusion of Mary and Magdalene, Mary is taken as a functional title to imply Virgin, Mother and Spouse.

We find the church compared with our Lady again the first hymn *On the Pearl*:

There was Mary whom I saw therein,
her pure conception, there was the Church,
and the Son within her; a likeness of that cloud
which carried him; symbol of heaven
from whence streams forth his glorious radiance
(Hymn on Faith 81,4)

Here the relationship implied is to Mary's conception, which immediately suggests to Ephrem the Church's motherhood of the mystic Christ.

In *H. Nat* 25,5, the Church is seen as a virgin mother typified by Mary as foretold by Isaiah:

Blessed art thou, O church, for Isaiah also
exalted thee in his prophecy
'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear
a child' whose name is a mighty symbol.

O the meaning revealed in the Church,
two names, which have united and become one,
Emmanuel, God with thee at all times,
since he united thee with his members.

This whole hymn is addressed to the Church, rejoicing with her in all the feasts of the year and in all the old Testament prophecies.

Ephrem speaks explicitly of Christ's handling of the Keys to Peter in *H. virg* 15:

Blessed are you also, Simon Kepha
who holds the key which the Spirit forged

The fourth *memra* 'On Holy week' contains the most explicit passage on Peter's primacy in all the Corpus of Ephrem's works:

Thee, Simon, my disciple, have I set
as the foundation of holy church,
I called thee Kepha from of old,
that thou mightest bear all buildings.
Thou art the overseer (bahora) of those
who build for me the church one earth:
if they build aything hateful,
thy foundation restrains them.
Though art the fountain-head of my teaching,
and thou art the head of my disciples,
By thee I will give drink to all nations;
thou hast the sweetness of Life which I will give,
It is thee I have chosen to be first born of my teaching,
to be heir of my treasures.
I have given thee the keys of my kingdom:
behold, thou rulest over all my possessions.

(cf Lamy I, 411)

As 'fountainhead' and as giving drink to all nations, Peter is implicitly compared to Moses' rock. The 'sweetness of life' is the Eucharist. Beck casts doubt on the authenticity of this text because of the explicitness of the doctrine. It should be remembered, however, that Ephrem is far from any circles that could have had any tendentious interest in developing 'Petrine claims'; hence an occasional text which in the light of later Roman preoccupations might be called 'stronger' is not to be judged later merely for that reason, since this sort of interest did not develop in the East Syrian Churches. Further, these *memre* contain doctrines which are characteristics of Ephrem in his authentic works for example, the notion that Christ 'de-consecrated' the eucharistic species to give to Judas, and the fusion of the Blessed Virgin and Mary Magdalene. In the passage where the latter is found, another reference to Simon Peter shows Kepha as a functional title:

For he was the *Kepha* and foundation
of the Church of the Gentiles, the elect

In EC 14 Ephrem connects the name *Kepha* more, with the stone of offence which Peter made himself, than with Peter's function as foundation. though Ephrem hints at the latter by his reading which makes the object of 'shall not prevail against' not to church but Peter. Christ building the church is implicitly the architect, a title which early syriac tradition applied to God as creator and Raisen-up, and saw as shared with Christ by the apostles and bishops. Christ has given us in the Church a Tower which really leads upto heaven and the Tree of Life, the source of the sacraments.

Conclusion

The study of symbolic names and titles such as apostle, ambassador, herald, fisherman, pontiff, etc. which relate Christ to the apostolic ministry and to the church gives us nothing that can be called an ecclesiology of the early syriac tradition. It is close to the Bible and can largely be accounted for by it. The use of symbolisms is without doubt devotional and liturgical, rather than theological; yet if we are to look for implicit 'ecclesiology' in the writings of the early syriac Fathers much of what is relevant is contained in these images. The one great truth they express is certainly a truth about the church. It is that Christ shared some of his functions with men and those functions are exercised still in the church. Only begotten son of God, second Adam, 'Life giver'—these he could not share. But the apostolic ministry shares in Christ's function as Head of the Body, as spouse of the Bride, as Apostle sent forth, as priest and key bearer, shepherd, steward, Farmer, Physician. The symbolism expressed by the titles 'Rock', *Kepha*, the Building on the rock, the Temple, etc. express the idea that Christ's work as Witness, Healer, Guide and Helper is continued in the sacramental society of the Church. The early Syriac authors have a high sense of the episcopal office and its continuity with the apostolic college. Likewise they have striking passages on Peter's

primacy but nothing on this being handed on. None of them say anything about any primacy within the episcopal college. Because of the isolation of the Syriac speaking church in Mesopotomea and Persia, this absence of explicit doctrine on the primacy in their tradition determined the subsequent development of that church's attitude, long after it had formally severed its unity with the west and split in two. As the independent Catholicosate of Selencia-Ctesiphon and the Jacobite Patriachate of Antioch gained standing, their respective adherents tended to apply the 'petrine texts' to their Catholicos or Patriarch, but often also to the whole episcopal college of their own church. Recently even autocephaly is being attributed to some of the churches with Syrian heritage.

SECTION IV

The Conception of the Church among the West Syrians who remained separated from Rome.

It is not possible to find any systematic treatise on the Church (ecclesiology) among these Syrians. One can find only occasional assertions and numerous scattered remarks of the theologians, historians and Canonists. There are numerous liturgical texts which bear testimony to the Petrine privileges. The Syrian liturgy is in fact a monument of love and enthusiasm of the Syrians for the Holy Church the Spouse of Christ and the Mother of the Children of God. One can find there often in poetic form, most abundant materials on the manner in which the Syrians conceived the intimate essence of the Church. Especially it is found in the office of the Dedication of the church, of Epiphany, of the Apostles, in the liturgy of baptism, ordination and marriage.

For the Syrians who are known as Jacobites the sources are Severus of Antioch, Philexinus of Mabbug, and for the later epoch, Yahya Ibn Jarir (11th century) in his theological compendium, *Le Livre du chef* 'Then Dionysius Bar Salibi' who shows (against Melkites, Armenians and Nestorians) that the Jacobite Church is the only one which leads to salvation. Finally the last Jacobite theologian of importance is Gregorius Bar Hebreus. The commentaries on the liturgy by Bishop George of the Arabs, of Moses Bar Kepha, the historical Works of Michael the Great and of Bar Hebreus and the diverse collections of Canons, bring also a certain contribution to the question. The Syrian theology in this matter presses very closely to tradition.

There is not much of a historical development of the doctrine to be found. That is why an exposition of the

doctrine of the church as the Syrians conceived it can be reconstructed only according to some systematic aspects and not historical aspects. Besides, an eventual development by a change in the situation of the Church ought not to be neglected. About the deep essence of the Church we find very little material among the authors, but much in the liturgical sources. Well understood the liturgy itself does not present any theological dissertation on the theme and one does not expect, it to be so.

The church is often praised in the hymns, in the prayers, by a rich language of words and images, like the *Spouse of Christ* united by most ardent love to her celestial spouse, adorned by him with all the imaginable ornaments. It is not at all easy to extract from the lyrical effusion, the proper theological content. The West Syrian liturgy like other liturgies, suggests the mystical union of Christ and of his church in company with the conjugal relationship of the earthly spouses as is done in the marriage and espousal ceremonies of the Orient. Christ wins her financee' the church by sacrificing for it his blood, shed upon calvary. As the financee' languishes severely as a captive of Satan, it is necessary to redeem her from him. Being polluted by sin she has the need of purification; this purification she finds in baptism which owes all its strength to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. The decisive moment of betrothal of Christ and the Church is consequently the crucifixion. According to Moses Bar Kepha, the Holy Church was formed from the blood and water which flowed from the side of Christ.

The baptism of Christ in Jordan is often compared to the betrothal with the Church: St. John Baptist consecrates their engagement. After her purification by the celestial spouse, the church is without stain and perfectly beautiful and richly adorned with inconceivable brightness. The liturgy bursts out, with predilection, in the poetic description of this beauty, of which the essence comes from the gift of the Holy Spirit and from the theological virtues.

In the cycle of images of redemption, the deliverance from error is placed in the foreground. Christ who has paid for his Spouse a sublime price and has redeemed her from misery, heaped on her, in his love, nuptial presents where appears at first view the gift of his body and of his blood in the holy Eucharist. The church is united to her celestial spouse by love and indefectible confidence, and this love becomes for both a source of inexhaustible joy.

The liturgy presents the union of Christ and the church through an Oriental Ceremony of courtship and marriage, when it speaks of the feast of the nuptial and of leading the bride to the nuptial chamber, by which the conjugal Union was sealed. The nuptial chamber is the heaven: the bridegroom prepares it and causes his spouse to enter there. The nuptial feast is the image of eternal happiness: all men are called to its delights which never ends.

The idea of the church as the Spouse of Christ, which the liturgy develops with great love, is found but rarely in the authors: Scarcely as an occasional title in Severus of Antioch and particularly in Bishop George of the Arabs who in his poem on Chrism (Muron) sings about the Church in so far as she is the Spouse of Christ.

If the church is the spouse of Christ she is the mother of those to whom Christ has by his death, procured eternal life. The West Syrian Liturgy gives merely enough to the Church the title of "mother", but she very often speaks about the "children of the church" and of the good things which the maternal Church dispenses to them. Through baptism men are born to a new life of the children of the mother church, who effects in them the gift of the remission of sins, of redemption, of the certitude of all the riches. Mother finds delight in guiding her children, and the children put their joy in their mother. All these ideas prove the great love of the Syrians for the Church.

The doctrine of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, of which the historical Christ is the *head* and which the Holy Spirit *informs* is found rarely in the authors and

even in the liturgy. The passages of scriptures which refer to these are at times cited by the authors, but without attempting to go deep into the implications. The Holy Spirit resides in the church and adorns her with his gifts and assists her in order that she teach the true faith. The Church, in so far as she is the spouse of the second person of the Blessed Trinity, is in close union with the three persons. This idea recurs often in the liturgy in the form of doxology at the end of the prayers.

The Church of Christ-his spouse and his body-is prefigured and represented in diverse ways by the personages and events of the Old and New Testaments. The Syrians love to discover everywhere the figures of the Church-and it is again a sign of importance which they attribute to it. The Ark of the covenant, the Ark of Noah, the stone of Jacob, the Rock of the desert from which Moses brought out water, and the burning bush, all of these are considered as foreshadowing signs. The woman clothed with the Sun (Rev. Chapt XII) is interpreted by Dionysius Bar Salibi as the figure of the Church. The church is the heavenly Jerusalem sung by St. John in chapter 21 of the book of Revelation.

Briefly speaking it is necessary to say that the Syrians in their teaching about the essence of the Church, have never gone beyond a general tendency and have not arrived at a systematic penetration of the theme.

They have, above all, conceived ideas about questions of practical and immediate interest. During the early years up to the Arab invasion the concept of *Communio* (Sauthofu-so Koinona) is at the first level. This was the period of Controversy between Chalcedonians and their opponents. The decisive point was to demonstrate that each party's *Communio* is the right one. It was not quite clear to which side many of the bishops belonged.

The predominant attitude of the West Syrians after the Arab invasion was that the Chalcedonians and Nestorians in so far as they are heretics, are outside the one and true Church. More than anyone else Dionysius Bar

Salibi defends this position in his controversy against the Melkites, the Armenians and the Nestorians. There are a few exceptions like Yahya Ibn Jarrir (+1080) who made the judgement on the three parties (monophysites, nestorians and Chalcedonians).

“The parties have one and the same doctrine—there is only a difference in their expression”

In the controversy we find the Jacobites defending the beauty of their church. According to them only one party is correct. They consider the Chalcedonians and Nestorians as heretics and as outside the true church of Christ. This Church is narrowed down after the council of Chalcedon to the “monophysite” (mistakenly called so, though they reject Entyches) Community under the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch, the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, the Ethiopian and Armenian Churches, and the Orthodox Syrian Church under the Catholicos of the East. The Patriarchs of Antioch and of Alexandria are entirely independent of each other, but united in one and the same communion that is recognising each other reciprocally as parts of one and the same true church. The Ethiopian Church depended on the Alexandrian. Even though the Armenian Church was in principle included into the patriarchate of Antioch it never occurred to the patriarch to exercise his authority in Armenia. Such was in fact the situation after the council of Chalcedon. The theoretical organization of the universal church was based on this situation. There exists no supreme head in the earthly order, one such head was not therefore necessary. The only head of the church is Christ. It is correct to say that this thesis has not been formulated very often by the Syrians; this has not been founded on reason but limited to the stating of fact. But recently this thesis is upheld by the Orthodox Syrian Church of Kerala. At the time of the controversy about Chalcedon Elias, the author of the biography of John de Tella, writes:

“Our head, properly said, is Christ; and after Christ Patriarch Mar Severus, Patriarch Mar Theodosius (Alexandria) and Patriarch Mar Anthimos (of Constantinople) with all the other orthodox bishops who, for love of truth, suffer persecution.”

The Patriarch of Rome and of Constantinople (after Anthimos) are considered as heretics though these two Patriarchates are considered as apostolic in origin. Patriarch Dionysius of Tellemahre (818-845) develops this doctrine. According to him the college of the four Patriarchs is the supreme authority of the church—if one falls into apostasy the other three ought to unite and condemn him. Among the other authors there are such persons like Yahya Ibn Jarir who say that the institution of the four patriarchates rose up at the council of Nicea. But this authority of the four patriarchs were never realized in the practical domain and become even impossible, after the defection of two of them. For the Jacobites the natural and the irrecusable head of their church, which is still only a part of the universal church is their patriarch. He is for them the successor of St. Peter.

It is clear that in such a conception of the organization of the universal church there is no place for the jurisdictional primacy of the Pope. If the bishop of Rome has lost the true faith and is found *ipso facto* outside the true church, no jurisdictional primacy of divine right can pertain to him. Although the primacy of the Pope of Rome is entirely neglected by the Syrian authors they mention here and there that the bishop of Rome exercised formerly in the Orient as well as in the Occident some sort of primacy. But in this regard they do not take any positive stand. A formal polemic against the Roman Patriarch is completely rare. In one letter of Philexinos, he speaks about the “tyranny of Rome”. But there is one instance of an attack on primacy. It is in the chronicle of Michael the Great, in the course of his citation from the *Tmemata* of Philippon, an Egyptian author of the sixth century. Michael has appropriated this text as the

truth; but this is not as he polemizes against Rome from his own initiative. It is certain that Pope Leo and his *Tomos* are on every occasion brutally challenged as heretic but there does not stand out a systematic hostility to the Roman primacy.

We do not find this hostility among the Syrians as one finds it among the Greeks. They had to deal less directly with Rome and besides they recognized the foundation of the primacy of the Pope, i.e. the presence of St. Peter, his see at Rome and the perennality of his charge in the Church, but not deriving the consequences of these premisses, which they cannot evidently do without denying their proper position.

That Peter had been the head of the apostles, this is a fact universally admitted by the West Syrians; a multitude of texts are there as testimony among the authors as well as in the liturgy. But they do not show the same unanimity in teaching that Christ had made Peter the foundation of his entire church, and that this apostle was afterwards really accepted as head. A great number of the authors explain the classical passage of St. Mathew (chapt. 16) in a sense which seems to exclude the primacy. According to Severus and Philoxenos, it is the faith of Peter and not his person, which is the foundation of the Church. Among the West Syrians Jacob of Sarug is the only one to comment on this text in the sense of a true primacy of St. Peter in the Church—and this is the reason to doubt of Sarug's belonging to the "monophysite" group. The position of the later Jacobites upon this question is not uniform. According to Yahya Ibn Jarir, the person of Peter is the Rock (Kepha) upon which the Lord has built his Church. Bar Saliai, is not always constant upon this question—By contrast Michael the Great and Bar Hobeus applies the text of Mathew straight out to the person of Peter. In the liturgy one finds numerous texts which celebrate St. Peter as the foundation of the church and the carrier of the power of the keys and the supreme pastor.

The power of Peter survive in the church not in one person only but on the contrary in the Patriarchs, in all the Orthodox bishops, indeed in all priests: thus thought already Philoxenus Bishop George of Arabs, Moses Bar Kepha, Bar Salibi, Michael the Great and Bar Hebreus represent the same tendency. The Jacobites do not infer that the full powers in the whole church fell to the actual bishop of Rome in so far as he is the successor of Peter.

The Jacobites conceive the church as 'Catholic' as an institution founded by Christ, clothed by him with his authority and with his divine powers imperishable and necessary for salvation. The protestant and the modern Orthodox (Greek and Russian) view of the church cannot be found support in the Syrian tradition. That Christ has founded one church, which is indestructible is as clear as day light to them, especially from the text of St. Mathew, "gates of hell shall not prevail against it"

The Lord has conferred on his apostles his power and his divine authority. Through the successors of the apostles, the Patriarchs and the bishops, and through the priests of the Church, these divine powers live at all times. These thoughts are clearly expressed by the Syrian authors in their commentaries upon the vocation of the apostles and of the passages of scripture concerning the transmission of powers to Peter and to his companions. Bar Salibi, for example, expresses this in these terms: "Our Lord has transmitted to Simon and through him to ourselves these two powers of binding and of unbinding, which belongs only to God." The Church exercises its powers and its authority in three ways: it teaches in the name of God the truths which are revealed; it has the right to command and to prohibit, and it procures to its children divine life and grace. In the matter of faith the common teaching of the "Fathers and Doctors" of the Church will be the rule. In the list comes the early bishops. It is not certain whether the present bishops have the same authority as

those of the first centuries in the matter of teaching. The Church exercises, its authority in the ecumenical councils; of these the Jacobites recognize only the first three.

Finally the necessity of the church as the only dispensatrix of salvation comes from this that the heretics who reject are lost eternally for the same reason.

Such are the basic conceptions of the West Syrians about the Church.

SECTION V

The Conception of the Church according to the Assyrian Church of the East (Sometimes called "Nestorian")

Among the East Syrians, a systematic treatise on the church is as rare as it is among the Jacobites. Abdiso (*1318) in the *Book of the Pearl*, his main theological work, is the only author who gives at least a short chapter to the 'Church'. As for the rest we have no other source than the occasional declarations of the Nestorians from which we can form an image of the church which they had.

From the beginning up to the Arab conquest our principal source is the *Synodonicon Orientale or Recueil des synodes nestoriens*. (The acts of the nestorians synods) published by J. B. Chabot who presents the acts of the first synods. In the homilies of Narsai on priesthood and in the chronicle of Arabella, some elements on the idea of the church are found. For the later epoch, there are more sources such as *proof of the truth of the faith* by Elias of Nisibis and the *book of the Pearl* mentioned above. These are theological works. Among the exegetical works are those of Theodorus bar Koni and of Iso'dao of Mery (9th century). Among the liturgical sources are the commentaries of Abraham bar Lipheh (7th century) and of the anonymous author (9th or 10th century) and of Timothy II (1318-1335). The collections of the Canons, especially those of Abdiso are also the sources. Among the historical works are the *Chronicle of Se'ert* and the *history of patriarchs* of Mari, Amr and Slilia.

The East Syrian Church of Persia seems to have declared itself to be independent of all exterior authority (by 424). Even if this can be doubtful it is certain that it

rallied round, nestorianism, condemned by the council of Ephesus, by the end of the fifth century. This rebellion against the council of Ephesus signifies its separation from the catholic church. This is the basic position of the East Syrian Church, the basic position from which its conception of the organization of the church will evolve.

For the theologians of the church, since its declaration of autonomy, its organization is an assumed fact: Catholicos of Seleucia—Ctesiphon is the highest religious authority on earth—authority which is subordinate to none other. The Synod of Markabta (in 424) proclaimed him the supreme head of the church, in declaring “that the Orientals cannot complain of their Patriarch before the occidental patriarchs;- any problem which cannot be resolved in his presence is reserved to the tribunal of Christ who has chosen him, elevated him and placed him as the head of his church.....” (Cf J.B. Chabot, *Synodican Orientale*, P. 296.)

For the church of Persia, the Catholicos of Seleucia, Cccsiphon is the successor of Peter. The expression used by the synod of 420 about Catholicos Mar Dadiso is that “he for us is Peter, the head of the ecclesiastical assembly”. *The Chronicle of Arabella* (6th century) already places the primacy of the catholicos on the same level as “the supremacy of Peter over the apostles”. From such texts it is clear that the Nestorian church admits the primacy of St. Peter; but it does not follow that in its conception Peter should have only one successor. The head of any independent church is Peter for them. For many Nestorians, the Nestorian Church, since the condemnation of Nestorius, is identical with the universal church, the whole occident having fallen into apostasy. All the heads of the churches (Successors of Peter) except the Catholicos of Persia have fallen into heresy. So Peter has only one successor and that is the Catholicos of the church of Persia. Many authors have written on the recognition of Peter’s primacy by the Nestorian church (thus for example, J. David, *Antiqua Ecclesiae Syro-Chaldaicae traditio Circa Petri Apostoli ejusque*

successoram divinum primatum; G. Khayyath, *Syri Orientales seu Chaldei Nestoriani Act Romanorum Pontificum primatus*; F. Martin, *Saint Pierre at Saint Paul dans L'Eglise Nestorienne*) Peter was the head of the apostles and it is upon him that the church has been founded: this is the unanimous teaching of the authors, and also of the liturgy. Some authors it is true, explain the classical text of Mathew 16/18 in such a manner as not to derive primacy of Peter from it; as for example Babai, the Great (628), Timothy I and Iso 'dao' of Merv. According to them it is not the person of Peter which is the foundation of the church but his faith. According to Theodorus bar Koni, by the rock about which Christ spoke he meant the apostles.

If the Catholicos of the church of Persia is for it the supreme head and successor of Peter, it is not so because he is the head of the universal church; it is rather because the universal church is supposed to be composed of different churches, independent from one another, and each of which possesses an independent head, as the successor of Peter. This theory already formed the basis of the declaration of autonomy in 424; later the authors have recovered and developed it. The Synod of Markabta has explained this point thus: "There is no motive for any one to think or assert that the Catholicos of the orient can be judged by those who are above him; or by a *Patriarch like him*". The other Patriarchs are in principle equal to the Catholicos and, because of this fact they cannot be his judges. If the right of appeal to the occidental Fathers was recognised till 424—this was done merely as a concession freely agreed to by the church of Persia, and not because it as part of the universal church, had to submit to a superior authority. The catholic church therefore is composed of a series of Patriarchates each one of them independent from the other; there exists no supreme authority to which all should subject themselves. (The Patriarchs of the occident are those of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople and the only Patriarch of the orient is the Patriarch of Persia, according to the Nestorians).

In spite of the above view of considering the Non-nestorian churches as fallen away Christian sects numerous Nestorians—including bishops and Catholicos consider the other churches as part of the true church.

For the Nestorians the conception of the unity of the church is very broad. According to them there is no need for a central authority to co-ordinate the particular churches. They simply assert that the church of Christ is one; but no precise and definite explanations are given. The Nestorians admit that the church is necessary for salvation. They conceive the church as an institution of divine origin and necessary for salvation, endowed with authority, i.e. divine authority; and in the church the bishops and the priests continue to exercise the powers conferred by Christ to his apostles.

SECTION VI

Prayers from Penquitho (of the Sunday of the Consecration of the Church and of the Sunday of the Dedication of the Church)

1. Our hearts overflow with noble thoughts
in praise of the bride adorned with all comeliness,
blessed by God from all eternity.
The Son of the King desired her beauty.
He is her Lord, We all pay homage to him.
The Word of God became flesh
to dignify humankind and share his life with us.
He lived among us and we saw his glory,
the glory of the Only Son of the Father full of truth
and love.
And he sheds it on the countenance of his Church
whose radiance is the light of the nations.
You who are radiant with the light of him who redeemed
you
be burning with zeal for the knowledge of God
and ever walk in his footsteps, in obedience to the truth.
Rejoice mystically in the Lamb of God,
as the apostles and holy fathers have taught you, and cry:
“Blessed are you who are the way, the truth and the life.”
How fair and comely you are, Church of true believers,
Bride of Christ, your Spouse.
Your hair falls on your shoulders,
and on your neck is a necklace of gold.
You are adorned with the blood of the martyrs.
In you is the true doctrine of life.
You take your pleasure in the heavenly bread of God
most high.

2. Rise and be clothed with light, O Church of true believers.
Your light is come, the Lord exalted and terrible
comes to dwell in you.

All peoples and nations
from one end of the world to the other
are gathered in you to hear the Good News
and to know that he is King for ever.
Praise unceasingly him who has chosen you from the
beginning
and has established his sacred altar within you
and has placed in you his body and his blood of life
for pardon.

Solomon built a great temple for your Divinity to dwell in.
Twice you descended in it, Most High,
and from the throne of the Winged Creatures your
voice was heard.

But on this holy altar we venerate the body of your
Only Son.

And with supplication we ask you to send your Holy Spirit
that he may sanctify it and purify it,
that it may be the dwelling place of your majesty
that those who confess the Trinity may receive him from it.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit.

Rejoice, thrill with joy, Church of true believers.
Raise your voice in song and chant the praise of the
Beloved Son
who suffered for you and delivered your children from
death,

and translated them into the swellings of life.
He has placed in you his body and his blood
that you may enter the bridal-chamber,
that you may take your pleasure with him in the heavens
and inherit eternal life
in the mysterious dwelling place where death has no power.
From age to age and for ever. Amen.

O Church, stand on the high mountains.
Sing praise to your Bridegroom who has taken away from
you

the evil of the darkness of error,
and made the true light to shine upon your face,
that it may spread on earth and dissipate the darkness
Say to the nations: "I stand and will not be shaken."
Confess without ceasing how great is the fruit within you;
he who is sacrificed by you for the remission of sins
instead of lambs and other victims.

To our fathers and brothers who rest now
and are quit of this life of time,
until the day of the resurrection of the dead
grant repose, Lord, to their souls in the abode of light.
May their bones in the tomb feel that memory is made
of them.

And when at your command the children of the earthly
Adam
rise and are clothed in glory and honour,
may they enter with you into Paradise
and lift up praise to you who are their resurrection.

3. Blessed are you, Church of true believers,
spouse of the heavenly Bridegroom.
Moses on Sinai had a vision of you, poor one, made
to reign,
all adorned and resplendent with gold
and arrayed in a robe as bright as fire.
When he saw your beauty he was moved
and filled with wonder at your loveliness.
He descended and made the tabernacle like you,
the passing tabernacle which came to an end.
And you the Church became renowned all over the world.

The Bridegroom has prepared a wedding-feast
and slayed the fatted calf
and called the guests, his people, to make merry with him.
The heavenly Bridegroom has made a feast for his guests
to rejoice in watching and fasting and prayer.
He has broken his body and made himself food.
He has mixed his blood and made himself drink.
Behold, the nations are saved by his blood.

The Church his Bride takes her delight in it,
 and his Mother who brought him forth sings praise to him.
 Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
 Spirit

Glory to the Son of God who espoused the Holy Church.
 He himself gave her his innocent blood as dowry
 and set up in her, baptism, a holy womb.
 He built in her the altar for the pardon of the world.
 He placed in her prophets and apostles
 and with them good martyrs.
 He gave her teachers of the true faith.
 Blessed is he who built the Church
 and adorned her with all beauty.
 From age to age and for ever. Amen.

On Sinai Moses saw the holy Church like a building
 all adorned, standing high, an image of all the nations.
 And when he descended and as he was commanded,
 he made a temporary tabernacle in its likeness
 for the priests, the sons of Aaron.
 The tabernacle came to an end, but the Church sings
 praise.

Her people in her cry out: "Holy, holy, holy are you, Son,
 who betrothed the Church and adorned her with all
 beauty.

5. Church of true believers, the Word, the Beloved Son
 of God

has marked you on the palm of his hands,
 your walls are indestructible.
 Bride of the Most High,
 rejoice and thrill with gladness on your feast.
 On the day of your Dedication raise your head with joy.
 Your shepherd is glad to meet you,
 he rejoices and sanctifies you.
 Priests stand in reverence to receive the Holy Spirit
 who descends and sanctifies the place of your celebrations.
 In the darkness of a thick cloud God descended on
 Sinai,

The mountain carried the Mighty One who carries all
things.

Legions of angels, companies of creatures of fire and
spirit

and innumerable powers descend sounding their trumpets
before the bridegroom who comes down from the heights
to espouse the holy Church.

Blessed be he who has built the Church and set up the
altar in it.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit.

O Church, on the day of your Dedication,
give thanks with beautiful songs
and offer gifts of praise to the Son.

Peace who reconcile those in heaven and those on earth,
give to your Churches the joy of peace and unity
and keep their people by the Cross of light.

Church whose feast it is, rejoice in your marriage
in the midst of your people

Behold, on all sides presents are brought to you.

Accept them as marriage gifts offered to a blessed bride,
that on your festival we may place them on your altar.

Church of the Spirit rejoice, for he dwells in you who
says:

"I will wipe away all tears and put an end to all sufferings.

I am the Alpha and the Omega,

I am the beginning and the end also the middle."

And you are the fulness of him who fills the creation.

Glory to the Father who built the Church with the
prophets.

Adoration to the Son who completed her with the apostles.

Thanksgiving to the Spirit who adorns her with mystic
gifts.

To him who is one essence and three, be glory.

6. Halleluia, halleluia, halleluia.

Remember your Church which you acquired in ancient
times,

when you delivered the people of your inheritance.
Halleluia, halleluia, halleluia.

Repair her breaches, turn her wilderness into a garden.
Make her put on the new nature,
constantly renewed in your image and likeness.
Halleluia, halleluia, halleluia.

7. Leap for joy and exult, on the feast of your Dedication,
O Church.

Sing praise to him who rules over the kings.
He betrothed you from the waters and set up within you
a holy altar in atonement for the sins of all your people.
Halleluia, sing to him in praise and thanksgiving,
to him who swells in you upon the altar.

On the top of Sinai Moses saw the Church as a blazing
fire.

He descended and made the tent of meeting in its likeness,
that the sons of Aaron might officiate in it.
Halleluia, blessed is he who built his Church on earth.
Every day she sings his praise.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit.

Issiah the prophet saw the Lord of all in the temple
seated on a throne of fire, and the Fiery Ones cried out:
"Holy, holy, blessed be the honour of the Most High"
Halleluia, glory to the Son of God
who betrothed the Church who adores him.

From age to age and for ever. Amen.

Receive our petitions, O Lord,
with the fragrant incense offered to your Godhead.
Forgive our offences and faults and pardon us all follies,
halleluia, that we may offer praise and thanksgiving,
to you and your Father and your Holy Spirit.

Our Lord built his Church on Simon the rock.
He made her his own dwelling place, high and sublime,
on seventy-two pillars from pure granite from the
mountains,
he the architect who built the highest heaven, halleluia.

You who uphole your Church,
be gracious and compassionate to us.

Brothers, do you not see how the bride is tossed
on the surging waves of the sea ?

Yet her treasures are not lost and she does not sink.
Moses goes before her and Aaron behind.

Myriam and her companions play the timbrel in the centre,
halleluia, halleluia, and sing praise to the Hero of the
world.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit.

The Church of believers is a paradise full of good things,
the bride of the Most High. In her is baptism for the
new life,

the holy altar and the bones of the martyrs.

In her dwell the priests who consecrate
and offer the Eucharist and distribute it,
halleluia, halleluia, the medicine of life.

From age to age and for ever. Amen.

Glory to Christ who built the holy Church
on the palm of his hand and set up altar in it,
and gave it as foundation the prophets and the apostles
and the holy martyrs who died for his love
Halleluia, halleluia, they take their delight with him
at the feast of gladness.

PRAYERS FROM THE COMMON PRAYERS LILIO ON MONDAY

Moses is the head of the Old, Simon of the New;
both resemble one another and God dwelt in them. Moses
brought down the tables of the Law, Simon received the
keys of the kingdom; Moses built the earthly tabernacle,
Simon built the Church, for the Old and for the New, glory
to you, O Lord, halleluia, may their prayer assist us.

RAMSHO ON TUESDAY

1. Blessed is he, who built the holy Church on the palm
of his hands, and placed as its foundations the prophets,

apostles and holy martyrs and assembled and filled her with all peoples; and behold, they offer praise in her by night and by day.

Blessed is he, who magnified you, prophets, apostles and holy martyrs, and placed your bones like lights within the holy Church, and honoured and magnified your memory here and above in heaven; may your prayer assist us.

2. You are blessed, O Church, to whom the word of the Son is a protection, and the bars of Sheol shall not prevail against you henceforth for ever. He gave you his flesh to eat and his blood, the chalice of salvation, in pardon for your children.

Earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord God, who swore to his Church: I will not forsake you for ever, your walls, O faithful Church, are before me at all times, and I myself will dwell within you.

LILIO ON THURSDAY

Simon Peter was catching fish in the sea, when his Lord called him and thus said to him: Come, Simon, and I will give you a catch of the Spirit and you shall draw men from death to life; and on you, Simon, I will build the holy Church, and the bars of Sheol shall not be able to prevail against it.

OTHER PRAYERS

I

SIMON, the chief of the Apostles, who ruled over all powers, that he might bind and loose without obstacle. Syriac Liturgy, in *Festo SS. Apost. Petri et Pauli*, Noct. I [Cod. de Propaganda (Syriac). 65, p. 369.]

II

Blessed art thou, whom the Son of God hath chosen, set at the head of His disciples, and gifted with a godlike power of loosing and binding.

It. Ibid. Noct. ii
Cod. eod. p. 373.

III

I will appoint Simon chief of My ministers : I will deliver all My treasures into his hands : I will give him the keys of both earth and heaven ; as he standeth firm before Me ; upon him I will raise the bulwarks of My Church.

[Ibid. *office of the Holy Week*, Fer. ii. Hor. vi
Cod. de Prop. (Syriac), 60 p. 67]

IV

Our Saviour bestowed a vast blessing on Simon, the prince of the Apostles, whom He made the foundation of the Church, and to whom He said; Feed My weanlings, the lambs of My flock, feed my sheep. Tend them sedulously and have them reared as children of the heavenly Jerusalem.

[Syriac Liturgy, *Feria auri, ad Vesper.*
Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 234, p. 58.]

V

Upon that rock of the household of Simon, the prince of the Apostles, I am built up, and have nothing to fear. -The Church took up the burden, saying:-Floods and storms broke upon me, but they did not strike me. The accursed Nestorius fought against me, and met with his ruin.

[Syriac Liturgy, *Sabat. ad prim.*
Breviarium Feriale. Edit. Rom. 1853, p. 409.]

VI

To Simon said his Lord: Thou art the rock of strength, on thee I will base My holy Church. Into thy hands I put the keys of heaven and earth, that thou, My true Disciple, mayest bind and loose according to My will. To thee I trust the flock, redeemed with my precious blood. Be a good Shepherd to them, guard them from evil.[Ibid. in Festo SS. Apost. Petri et Pauli. Noct. ii cod. de Prop. 64. p. 141]

VII

Glory be to the Lord, full of majesty, who despatched to the most powerful city of Rome, a "par" of illustrious Disciples, Peter and Paul.

Syriac Liturgy, in Offic. SS. Apost. Petri et Pauli,
Noct. I Cod. de Prop. (Syriac), 64, p. 135]

VIII

Tell me, O Church, whereon wilt thou be built?
 Shall I build thee, shall I build thee...
 On the sun?
 No no, no no, no no ...
 For it is said, for it is said, ...
 And that is said in the Scriptures,
 That the rays of the sun shall be darkened.

2

Tell me, O Church, whereon wilt thou be built?
 Shall I build thee ... on the moon?
 No, no, no ...
 For it is said ... in the Scriptures,
 That the moon shall not give her light.
 Tell me, O Church, whereon wilt thou be built;
 Shall I build thee .. upon the stars?
 No, no, no ... For it is said .. in the Scriptures,
 The stars shall fall like leaves.

3

Tell me, O Church, whereon wilt thou be built?
 Shall I build thee ... on a rock?
 Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes ...
 For it is said ... and that is said in the Scriptures:
 Upon a Rock I will build My Church.

[Syriac Hymnologium for all the Year, *Hymnum Dedicat.
 Ecclesiae.*

Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 188, p. 73]

FROM THE SEDRO OF THE SUNDAY OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH

“He (The Lord God Messiah) dwells in heaven, in the Church which is his house, in the throne, in the Church building, in the chariot of the Cherubim and in the sanctuary. He has made the Church his abode and his dwelling place. Her beauty is beyond description. In shape she is the bird which has been described by David. The heavenly powers have surrounded her. Isaiah has compared Her in various similies: Moses foretold her as a tabernacle ... She is an attractive fortress, she is the ship of the gospel, She is the stable city, She is the established town, Strong Tower, Holy mountain; she is progressively engaged in sublime things.”
(From the Sedro of *Ramso of the consecration of the Church*).

Jacob of Serug

1. (John) did not go into (the sepulchre) until the perfect Simon arrived:

He waited for the arrival of him, who was carrying the
Keys of the Church:

Of him who, as steward of the House, was to open and
enter it first:

John stayed back wisely and did not go into
(the sepulchre):

That he should not thwart the settled order of preaching:

He awaited the coming of the Prince of the Disciples,
who was left behind:

That (Peter) might first behold and bear witness to the
resurrection:

Simon Kipho, the head of the structures came up, and
entered before him:

That he might be built first into the edifice of the
Apostleship:

The spiritual child dutifully yielded to his worthy elder:

That, as he is in the foundation, he might also be first in
his preaching.

[St. James of Serug., *de Resurrectione Domini*, Homil. 72
Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 118, p. 296, a tergo.]

2. Thou art Kipho: down in the foundations of the great house
I will set thee: upon thee I will build My elected Church.
The wholeness of thy frame shall bear her weight; she
will not sink.
I will place thee first in my building, thou being hardy.
Be thou the basis to the Holy Temple which I am to
inhabit.

On thee I will expand all the superstructures of the
Daughter-of-day.

[St. James of Serug., *de Inter. Christ et Revel. Petri*, Homil.
XXIV. Cod. Vatic (Syriac) 460, p. 181.]

3. (Christ) entered upon the house, chose a stone, and set
the foundation.
(Gave the bride) an earnest to overcome death and Satan.
The Great Apostle was the foundation of the Great House.
Which the bride was to enter (as) a stronghold undefiled.
(Christ) raised her a Chamber, and, lest she might be
affrighted, warranted her
That miscreants should never prevail against her surety.
He began to build her, and upon the Great Stone, He
had found,
Set her building, whose height was to transcend the
clouds.
Two-and-ten stones He had laid in the Palace of Light.
But One was singled out to support the great building.
He dressed, marked and carved the main stone He had
found.
And set it deep in the great building He was raising.
The Bridegroom chose it, His Father carved it in that
revelation.
And the Holy Ghost had it finished and settled in the
foundation of the Church.

[St. James of Serug., *de Interrog. Christ et Revel. Petri*,
Hom. XXIV. Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 460, p. 181.]

4. Thy strength is that of a rock, hence (I say) “Thou art a rock. And upon thee I will build My Church,” for thou wilt never break into pieces.

Thou art a rock, and upon thee I will build the Glorious.
The powers of hell, with their own crafts, shall not
prevail against her.

And what are they, tell me, the bars of hell,
But death and Satan, who lay waste the earth?

[St. James of Serug. *Homil. supra citata*
Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 460, p. 182.]

5. Upon having called the Son (of God) by His own name.
He blessed him, and had His Church built upon that
Apostle.

He made him a rock, and set it down in the foundation of
His House.

Seeing that he was to keep the whole fabric from shrinking.

[St. James of Serug., *ibid.* Cod. eod.]

6. (Peter) He was the leader to penance; hence
The Church is well built upon him in all shifts.
Prudent indeed was the Son of the carpenter who laid her
foundation,

And purposely built her upon Simon at the beginning.
Of penance, rather than of any thing else, the Church
is exultant,

Since by it all her congregations thrivingly flourish.

Should an adulteress of thieves ever struggle to get into
(paradise)

Without oenance, who would open to them the door?

For this the Church is built upon him who denied,

That all her superstructures might closely cement without
rifting.

[St. James of Serug, de Abnegatione Simonis, Hom. 57.

Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 118, p. 238, a tergo]

7. I betrothed the Bride : a sumptuous banquet is getting ready for me.

Do thou first cull the spices, thou who art true.

To thee I entrust the chamber of the Daughter-of-Day.

On thee I build her an impregnable fortress.

[The same, de Interrog. Christ et Revelat. Petri, Homil. XXIV Cod. Vatic (Syriac), 460, recenter additus, p.182.]

8. He was first, and since he had sinned, and turly repented,
 He did not descend to a second or a third degree.
 He rose with tears, and guarded his post unalterably.
 Carrying in his hand the keys, the name and the mandate.
 What he had lost by his denial, he recovered by his tears.
 For in perfection there is not another above him.

[St. James of Serug., *de Denegat. Simonis*, Hom. 57
 Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 118, p. 239.]

9. The power which Elias had (Christ) had bestowed on Simon,
 That he should loose and bind like God. As a great master of the house,
 He brought those of Simon and those of Moses together,
 To match the new with the old at preaching.
 He requested the great of the houses to interchange;
 The old to yield the keys to those who were young.

[St. James of Serug, Homil. *de Transfig. Domini*.
 Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 177, p. 538, a tergo, col. 2.]

10. (Christ) summoned Moses, the leader of prophetship,
 And John, the ornament of the Apostleship.
 Summoned Elias, too, and joined to him Simon, the head
 of the Apostles,
 That the keys he received over all (the Church) might
 be sanctioned;
 Brought forth the Gospel, to sway the world through
 Simon;
 Brought in Moses as a witness, because he is true.

[The same, *ibid.*
 code. eod. p. 539]

11. To thee I will gave the keys of My realm. Christ
 pledged to him (Peter)
 That he should be the foundation and the great master
 of the house.
 If thou bindest on earth, it shall be bound in heaven.
 If thou loosest on earth, it shall be loosed in heaven.
 On high, and deep below He gave might to the
 Apostledom.

That up and down it should have a lordlike sway.

[St. James of Serug., de Interrog. Chrssti, Homil. 24
Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 460, recenter additus, p 182.]

12. With a loving appellation, which the Father had revealed to him. Simon called his Lord, "Christ, the Son of God;" and forthwith he received, as a crown from a royal hand, the great blessing of an unerring faith. As a reward for his confession He (Christ) granted to that disciple that every man should confess as he himself had confessed, and should receive blessings.....The blessing He bestowed upon him was like an earnest of faith, that that confession should be firmly kept up all over the world.

[St. James of Serug., de Interrogat. Christi, etc., Hom 24.
Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 460, recenter additus, p. 181.]

Moses Barcepha

1. So when they had supped, Jesus said to Simon Kipho: Barjonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He said into Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus said unto him: Feed Me My lambs ... Feed Me My rams ... Feed Me My sheep.
[Moses Barcepha, de Cerem. Ord. in Joh, xxi. 15-17. Vers. Peshito. Cod. de Prop. Sharfian (Syriac), p.184, a terge.]
2. Under the name of lambs (Jesus) meant the Pastors and Prelates of the Church, over which Simon was appointed by his Lord Head and Ruler ... Likewise under the same name of lambs He meant the holy twelve Apostles and the seventy-two Disciples. Next, under the name of rams He meant the Priests, the Doctors, the prelates, and Rulers ... Lastly, he called sheep the holy flock of all the faithful together.
[The same, ibid. Cod. eod.]
3. The Lord Jesus Christ asked His Disciples, saying: "Whom do men say the Son of man is?" (Matt. xvi. 13) Peter, confessing Him, answered: "Thou art the Christ,

the son of the living God.” Then Christ said to Peter: “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona ... Thou art a rock, on thee I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Thou shalt be named ROCK (Kipho)....

By this name our Lord meant to show His Disciples how warm was the faith of Peter, which is as pure as a flint-stone (silex), without mackled or flaw. And therefore our Lord said to Peter: “Upon thee I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

[Moses Barcepha, de Dedicat. Ecclesia Homil. 1. Cod. Vat. Garsciunice exarato 159, p.314]

4. Christ himself did not confer it (the High Priesthood) upon the virgin John, full of zeal though he was besides, but on the married Simon, who had also experienced weakness by denying Him.

[Moses Bar-cepha, de Sacerdotio, Tract- ii ch. 7 Cod. de prop. Sharfian (Syriac) p. 103, tergo].

5. (Peter) denied, and by an oath confirmed his denial; but he did not forfeit therefore the apostolic dignity, or the pre-eminence he had over his brethren. Nay, he heard his Saviour telling him: “Feed both my lambs and my sheep;” which also He proved by the fact, when he said to him: “Simon, behold, Satan is seeking to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith may not fail, and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren, that is: that indulgence which has been granted to thee; a sinner, do thou likewise bestow upon thy failing and erring brethren. The same. *ibid.* Tract. v. ch. I Cod. eod. p. 112.]

6. The Disciples were all Apostles; each of them had received the imposition of hands from our Redeemer, all of them were made Bishops; but for the sake of government, Simon was appointed Chief.

[Moses Barcepha, de Sacerdotio, Tract 4, cap. 6 Cod. eod. p. 124.]

7. If he who has to be consecrated, be a patriarch, in addition to what is said above about the delivery of the pastoral staff ... In the reception of the pastoral staff, Christ is understood to say what He had said to Peter alone, namely: "Be thou converted, and strengthen thy brethren"; and again, "Thou art the Rock," by which words be placed him over his colleagues, though they were all pastors.

[The same, in *Exposit. Ceremon. Ordinationis Cod. eod.* p. 185.]

8. Then our Lord said to Peter: "What thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven;" and at the same time He entrusted to him the primacy over His disciples; delivered to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and enriched him with blessedness.

[Moses Barcepha, *de Dedicat Ecclesia*, Hom. 1 Cod. Vatic. (Gar sciunice), 159, p. 314.]

9. Simon Barjona, who was surnamed Kipho, that is Peter, the prince of the Apostles, ... went to Rome ... and built there a Church, which he made the See of the Prince of the Apostles, and ruled over it for twenty-five years.

[Moses Barcepha, *de Dedicat, Ecclesiae*, Homl. 1. Cod. Vatic. (Garsiunice), 159, p. 314.]

Denis Bar-Salibi

1. Under the name of lambs (Christ) referred to children, who are pure and meek; under that of rams, to men; and to women under that of sheep. He like-wise named lambs the Apostles, according to that: Behold, I send you as lambs among wolves, i.e. If thou lovest Me, take care of thy brethren the Apostles. And by rams and sheep He signifies princes and wealthy people.

[Denis Bar-Salibi (Bishop of Amida), *Comment. in Johan Cod. Vatic. (Syriac)*, 239, p. 260, a tergo.]

2. As they (the Apostles) had forsaken Simon; whom (Christ) had elected to be their chief, He (Christ)

turned away from them, and pointing towards Simon, said, "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to sift you as wheat, ... (Luke xxii. 31) And then He went on thus addressing Simon: "I will let you alone for a while, that Satan may try your weakness, whilst you will forsake Me and flee away. Yet for thee I prayed that thy faith may not fail; "which is to say: Thou wilt deny Me, but I will not let thee persevere to the end in thy denial ... And thou, being once converted, mind to confirm thy brethren; that is, although they may be overwhelmed and detached, as thou hast also (been detached, and separated) from Me, do thou confirm and support them in their faith, and receive them, as I did Myself receive and confirm thee.

(Denis Bar-Salibi, Comment in Lucam. (xxii.24) Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 288, p.217.)

3. It is then through Simon that Christ invested every true priest with the power of loosing and binding. These two promises, which none but God could ever have made, were made to Simon alone, and to us, but through him, by our blessed Lord.

Dionysius Barsalibi. Comment. in 4 Evang. Cod. Vatic. (Syriac). 155, p. 102.]

Bar-Hebraeus

1. (The Disciples) seem to have forgotten what had been said to Peter, viz: "Thou art a rock, upon thee I will build My Church," and "To thee I will give the keys of heaven."

[Bar-Hebraeus, Thesaurus Mysteriorum, in Luke xxii. 24 Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 282, p. 197, a tergo.]

2. The old pontificate had ceased, and the new one begun; it was confirmed by our Redeemer when He established Peter, head of the Apostles, and gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

[Gregory Bar-Hebraeus (Abulpharagius), in Chronic. Cod. Vatic. (Syriac), 166, p. 247, a tergo.]

BOOK OF STEPS

Discourse XII: ON THE MINISTRY OF THE HIDDEN AND THE MANIFEST CHURCH

BRETHREN, since we believe that there is a hidden selfemptying of the heart when it leaves the earth and is raised up to heaven, it is right that we should empty ourselves in the body too of our possessions and inheritance. Then we shall be keeping the commandments of him who gives life to all, and we shall realize that the person who is bound up in our Lord and ponders on him continuously possesses hidden prayer of the heart. Let us pray with our body as well as with our heart, just as Jesus blessed and prayed in body and in spirit; and so too did the apostles and prophets pray. We should not be fools who fail to listen to their parents: we should not lose our spiritual parents and acquire false parents who belong to the flesh, who will cause us to stray from the truth of our Lord and those who preach Him.

And since we know that there is a hidden fasting of the heart, fasting from evil thoughts, we should also fast openly, just as our Lord fasted and as did those who have preached him, of old and more recently. Since we also know that the body is become a hidden temple and the heart a hidden altar for ministry in the spirit, we should show our eagerness at this visible altar and in this visible temple, so that, as we labour in these, we may have rest for ever in that church in heaven which is free and magnificent, and at that altar which is adorned and exalted in the spirit, before which the angels and all the saints minister, while Jesus acts as priest and effects sanctification before them, above them, and on every side of them.

And since we know that the 'perfect' are baptized in Jesus Christ and purified in a hidden way, we should firmly believe in this visible baptism, that it is of the Spirit, effecting forgiveness and remitting sins in the case of everyone who has faith in it, is baptized, and does good works.

2. It was not without purpose that our Lord and his preachers, of old and in more recent times, established this Church, altar and baptism which can be seen by the body's eyes. The reason was this: by starting from these visible things, and provided our bodies become temples and our hearts altars, we might find ourselves in their heavenly counterparts which cannot be seen by eyes of flesh, migrating there and entering in while we are still in this visible church with its priesthood and its ministry acting as fair examples for all those who imitate there the vigils, fasting and endurance of our Lord and of those who have preached him. Let us both do and teach this; then, once we have attained to humility and have shown honour to everyone, great and small, the heavenly church and the spiritual altar will be revealed to us, and on the altar we shall make a sacrifice of thanksgiving in the prayer of our hearts and in the supplication of our bodies, believing all the time in this visible altar, and assured in this priesthood ministering there; for everything that exists in this church has been established in the likeness of that hidden church.

If, however, we should have doubts and despise this visible church, with its visible altar and visible priesthood, and this baptism that brings forgiveness, then our body will not become a temple. neither will our heart become an altar or a well-spring of praise. Nor shall we have revealed to us that church on high with its altar, its light and its priesthood, where are gathered all the saints who are pure in heart, who dwell in its glory, exulting in its light, seeing that they do not despise this blessed nurse who daily gives birth and brings up fair wards whom she sends on to that great church on high.

This visible church can be seen by everyone: its altar, baptism and priesthood were instituted by our Lord; for in it our Lord prayed, and his apostles were both baptized in it and they sacrificed his Body and his Blood in it, truly serving as priests. It is the church in truth, and the blessed mother who brings up everyone as children. Likewise that body and heart in which our Lord dwells—also because the

Spirit resides there—is in truth a temple and an altar, seeing that our Lord resides there, as it is written: Your bodies are temples of the Lord and Christ dwells in your inner person. (1 Cor 6:19)

As for the church in heaven, all that is good takes its beginning from there, and from there light has shone out upon us in all directions. After its likeness the church on earth came into being, along with its priests and its altar; according to the pattern of its ministry the body ministers outwardly, while the heart acts as priest inwardly. Those who are diligent in this visible church become like that heavenly church as they follow after it. This is why the visible church is supremely important, being the mother of all those who are baptized; but in particular it is because the face of our Lord shines upon her and illuminates her.

3. This church, with its altar and baptism gives birth to men and women as children, and they suck her milk until they are weaned. Then they come to growth and to knowledge that belongs both to the body and to the heart, whereupon they make their bodies temples and their hearts altars; they consume solid food, superior to milk, until they become perfect and consume our Lord Himself in truth, just as He himself said, 'Whoever shall consume me shall be alive because of me' (Jn 6:58). Once they have eaten the true food—as the Apostle said, 'The true food belongs to the perfect who are trained (Heb 5:14) in strength to know what is the height, depth, length and breadth'—(Eph 3:18) then they attain to that church on high which makes them perfect, and they enter the city of Jesus our King. There they worship in that great and perfect palace which is the mother of all the living and the perfect.

Accordingly we should not despise the visible church which brings up everyone as children. Nor should we despise this church of the heart, seeing that she strengthens all who are sick. And we should yearn for the church on high, for she makes perfect all the saints.

4. These three churches and their ministries possess Life, but one glory is greater than another. (1 Cor 15:14) Someone who passes away from the ministry of this church without attaining to the church of the heart or to that on high, still departs from this world without sins; he is virtuous and his good works accompany him. But the person who passes away from the church of the heart is even better; and as for the person who attains in his heart to the church on high and then passes away, blessed is his spirit. He will become perfect and will go to see our Lord face to face. By striving in this visible church a person will find himself in the church of the heart and in the church on high: just as when someone is baptized in visible water, he receives from it baptism in fire and in the Spirit, (cf Mt. 3: 11 Lk 3: 16) neither of which is seen; or, just as, once someone has had faith, he will come to love, and once he has loved he will be made perfect, and once he is made perfect he will reign. Without this visible baptism no one is baptized in fire and in Spirit, and without this visible church no one will be in either the church of the heart or in the church on high. For if someone is separated from the visible church, and 'ministers in the mountain', then he has either proved guilty or gone astray. But wherever he is, it should have been assured for him that Life exists in her, and he should not break his covenant.

5. Just as a nurse who brings up a child teaches it to eat bread as something superior to milk, so does this visible church teach her children to eat something better, and far greater, whereby they can grow up. It is not the case that the nurse who brings up a child does not have other food, but it is the child who is too feeble for food, and so milk is appropriate for it. Nor is the Spirit who ministers in the visible church weaker than the Spirit who ministers in the heart or on high, for one and the same Spirit ministers to all three. But the children of Adam are very feeble, and unless the church brings them up like children, they will not be able to take solid food.

But what nursing mother who has many children, some thirty years old, others only thirty days old, is going to be able to set before them all one and the same food? If she were to set before them just solid food alone, then her thirty day old child would die, whereas the thirty year old would grow; but if she provided only milk, then the thirty day old one would live and grow plump, whereas the thirty year old one would die in agony. This is the reason why our Lord and his preachers, who serve as leaders for everyone, instruct the thirty day old child as follows: 'Do not eat with adulterers or mix with prostitutes, drunkards and accursed people, or with any whose actions are evil'; but to the thirty year old they say, 'Take on the sickness of the sick, and be all things to all men; (cf 1 Cor 5:9, 9:22) do not call anyone a pagan or unclean (Acts 10:28) or evil, even though he may be so. Hold everyone to be better than (Phil 2:3) yourself, and in this way you will grow in stature.

6. Thus they instructed everyone in accordance with what was appropriate for him. If someone thirty days old were to go off to the house of evil men, he would perish; but if a thirty year old goes to the house of evil men, he may convert them; and if they are not converted, he himself will not perish, for he has become a fully grown man in the spirit.

Likewise they instruct a person whose nature is youthful and inexperienced (cf 2 Thess. 3:12) to work and then to eat, until he recovers his strength. It was not that the Apostle was worried about the food: he was afraid that when such a person stopped his visible work, not knowing how to undertake hidden work he might learn about foolishness, deceit and slander, and thus fall into old wives tales, joking, laughter and distasteful story-telling, (cf 1 Tim 4:7 & Eph 5:4) forgetting that he is a Christian. On the other hand, to the person who is grown up in mind and experienced in heart, who knows how to undertake invisible work, our Lord and those who preach Him say, 'Do not worry about your

body, what you are going to wear, (Mt 6 : 25 & Lk 12:22) or about how you are going to sustain yourself; rather, you should seek for what is above, and ponder on what is above'. (Col 3 : 1-2) For any one like this is able to admonish, pacify, exhort and teach people to act pleasingly to Him who gives life to all; such a person will stop people from distasteful story telling, joking, inappropriate laughter, bad language and evil actions. Because such conduct is so useful, our Lord does not allow someone who is of such assistance to all to toil on the land, for he says to him as he did to Simon, 'If you love me, shepherd my flock, my sheep, my ewes and my lambs'. (Jn 21:15-17) Now the person who shepherds the flock of Christ cannot go off and work with a plough or labour on the visible land; he will be gathering in, shepherding, and pacifying the sheep entrusted to him. He shall stand with unabashed face on that final day before Him who bade him 'Shepherd my flock, my ewes and my lambs'.

7. Blessed is the person who has entered that church in heaven, in which our Lord shines out openly in the same way that the visible sun does over this visible church and over these temples consisting of our bodies. However often the sun may set from these, from the church above the light of the countenance of our Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ never departs. For even though our Lord is in every place, he is only to be seen openly in that church which is in heaven, and only by those who have abased themselves and become at rest, gentle towards everyone, people who have struggled and done battle on their own with evil spirits, who have purified their hearts of evil thoughts, just as the Apostle said, 'Your struggle was not with (Eph 6; 12) human beings of flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with evil spirits and with Satan the corruptor'. Those who have fought with Satan and vanquished him become worthy of this church which is above all, in which our Lord shines out openly, and they receive the glorious light of his countenance. (cf ps 4: 6) For our Lord said, 'Blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God'. (Mt 5:8)

Even though there are other blessings and other places, for each according to his works, yet only those who have been purified from all that is evil and from defiled thoughts are raised up to that great place and can behold it: they are glorified along with our Lord Jesus and they receive blessings from his priesthood. Who will go up to the mountain of the Lord and who will dwell in His holy mountain? (ps 24: 3-5)—this is the church which is in heaven: The person whose hands are pure and who is chosen in his heart. This is the one who will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from God our Saviour—who is our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise to him for eternal ages, amen.

APPENDIX

(A Theological Post Script)

If we are to find a way out of the ecumenical impasse about the identity of the Church we have to reflect more profoundly on the real basis and meaning of the Church and its task in the modern world. The basis and meaning of the Church is not an idea, a principle, or a programme. It is not comprized in so many dogmas and moral injunction. It does not amount to specific Church or social structures. All these things are right in their setting. But the basis and meaning of the Church is a person. And not a vague person, but one with a specific name: Jesus Christ. The many Churches and communities and groups within the Church however much they differ among themselves agree on one thing: their claim to represent the person, word and work of Jesus Christ. Even if their results are controversial they have one starting point and one centre. The Churches can solve the problems that beset them only from that centrepont, and only by reference to it.

The gospels, even though they contain much detailed and authentic historical material, are not historical witnesses in the modern sense. They are rather testimonies of faith. It is the Christological credo of the early church that we find in the writings of the New Testament. Therefore Jesus of Nazareth is accessible for us only by way of the faith of the Christian Churches. Even today, therefore, the community of the Church is the proper location of the Jesus tradition and encounter with Christ.

The Church is more than a social organization for religious purposes, even if these purposes would be Christian and would bear the stamp of Christianity. Whereever there are human beings there is "Church" in the sense of religious organization. Whereever any religious attitudes and any religious practices at all are found, even among those who

protest against the church, they form a community from the view point of the sociology of religion and constitute something like a "Church" in this very broad and provisional sense even if they call themselves a "free religion". When we say that Christianity must be constituted as a Church, we mean that this ecclesial community belongs to the religious existence of man as such, quite independently of the question how it must be constituted more precisely in the concrete. It is part of man's question about salvation and it is fundamentally co-constitutive of his relationship to God. It is in this sense that we are maintaining that Church has something to do with the essence of Christianity, and that it is not merely an organization for the practice of religion, which in its real meaning would also be conceivable independently of such a religious organization.

The maker of heaven and earth built
 his Church – He made his abode
 there and entered and lived in it,
 all those who want to converse
 with the Lord, should enter into
 it, for He lives within it. (Lilio of Sunday)

QUESTIONS

- I. Explain briefly the terms
 - (1) Church
 - (2) Syriac Tradition
 - (3) Syriac Churches
- II. Trace briefly the development of Ecclesiological thought
- III. Describe briefly some of the images and metaphors of the Church found in Aphrahat and Aprem.
- IV. Compare and Contrast the conception of the Church as found among the West Syrians who remained separated from Rome and among the Syrians of the Assyrian Church of the East.
- V. What conclusion on the Constitution on the Church can you arrive from the liturgical texts and from the texts of the Syriac writers.

Other Courses to Follow

- 1 **The Person and Message of Christ: a positive evaluation of the different Christologies.**
[Rev. Dr. V. C. Samuel, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam]
- 2 **Baptism and Chrismation in the Syriac Tradition.**
[Rev. Dr. Baby Varghese, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam]
- 3 **Philoxenos of Mabbug**
[Rev. Dr. M. A. Mathai, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam]
- 4 **“Sedre” as “Locus Theologicus” of the West Syriac Church**
[Rev. Dr. Jacob Thekeparampil, SEERI, Kottayam]
- 5 **“Anaphorae” Characteristic of the creative genius of the syriac Liturgy**
[Rev. Dr. Thomas Panicker, Mar Ivanios College, Trivandrum]
- 6 **Mysticism in the Syriac Tradition**
[Prof. Dr. Georg Gunter Blum, University of Marburg, West Germany].



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